



## Online Free Knowledge Sharing

[UNESCO's](#) Kronberg Declaration on the Future of Knowledge Acquisition and Sharing is blunt: the future of learning will increasingly be mediated by technology, and traditional educational processes will be revolutionized. Acquiring factual knowledge will decrease and instead people will need to find their way around complex systems and be able to judge, organize and creatively use relevant information.

According to Abdul Waheed Khan, UNESCO's Assistant Director General for Communications and Information, "Lack of access to knowledge increasingly accentuates marginalization and economic deprivation, and we need to join efforts to bridge these gaps"

More and more initiatives are stepping in to break down barriers in the exchange of information and knowledge, and break out from the gatekeepers. The advent of Web 2.0 and its user-contribute resources is making this happen.

[Connexions](#) sees itself as the partner to go with the free and low-cost laptops being distributed by the [One Laptop Per Child Project](#) to schoolchildren in the developing world. Connexions is a Web 2.0 website that allows teachers and educators to upload their learning materials by subject for sharing with anyone who wants them. All content is broken down into modules for easy access. The content can be mixed to build courses, and adapted to suit local conditions. It represents a cornucopia of knowledge, ranging from mathematics to engineering to music lessons.

The content's adaptability is its charm - users can add additional media like video and photos and modify and add on-the-ground case studies to really bring the material to life for students. The ability to re-mix and re-contextualise into the local circumstances is critical to get take-up of these resources argues Connexions.

[Open Educational Resources](#) is a global teaching and learning sharing website. It is all about getting teachers to open up and share their knowledge with other teachers. It contains full courses, course modules, syllabi, lectures, homework assignments, quizzes, lab and classroom activities, pedagogical materials, games and simulations. It is run by [ISKME](#), an independent, non-profit educational think tank whose mission is to understand and improve how schools, colleges, and universities, and the organizations and agencies that support them, build their capacity to systematically collect and share information

Another excellent way to share information is the online publishing tool [Lulu](#). While it is free to publish - whether a book, photo book, brochure, artwork, digital media, DVD and e-books - it does cost the person who wants to download or order a printed and bound copy. The creator of the content gets to choose how much should be charged and what is a fair price. The beauty of this website is the ability for anyone to publish and to bypass the limitations of traditional publishing.

Once you have created your content, and taken the decision to share it with the world, you can also make sure it is copyright protected so that nobody except you makes money from it. It is aimed at authors, scientists, artists and educators, and lets them protect their work for free. The [Creative Commons initiative](#) allows repeat use for free of the content as long as the user attributes its source to its original author. Any content you publish online will be given a logo clearly stating what

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rights it has.

#### LINKS:

- Professor Richard Baraniuk explains his concept in a video: click [here](#) to view
- The Creative Commons provides free tools that let authors, scientists, artists and educators to easily define what rights they will allow people to have who use their work. The website has all the tools (including logos) to get started licensing work:  
[www.creativecommons.org](http://www.creativecommons.org)
- Kronberg Declaration: [Kronberg Declaration.pdf](#)

## Social Franchising Models Proving Poor Bring Profits

The four billion people in the world who live on less than US \$2 a day have been described as the bottom of the economic pyramid, or BOP for short. In his book *The Fortune at the Bottom of the Pyramid*, Indian business consultant and professor [CK Prahalad](#) argues that this attitude must be turned on its head: rather than seeing the world's poor as a burden, only worthy of charity, Prahalad sees nothing but opportunity and unmet needs that business can address. In short, he argues, profits can be married with the goal of eradicating poverty.

Prahalad has gone so far as to claim this is a market potentially worth US \$13 trillion, while the World Resources Institute puts it at US \$5 trillion in its latest report, [The Next 4 Billion](#).

One of the tools business is turning to reach the world's poor is known as social franchising. The concept borrows from the business world and the highly successful franchise models that are more commonly associated with fast-food restaurants and computer and clothing retailers - wherever rapid expansion and scale are required to reach the biggest market possible. And there is no bigger market, social franchising advocates claim, than the world's four billion poorest people.

In the past, most formal business in developing countries chased the small middle class or the even smaller elite or foreign expatriate communities. Traditional poverty eradication strategies have also been criticized for being too narrow, focused on a very small group, or for wasting time and resources replicating what has already been achieved elsewhere, and for ballooning and shrinking depending on aid grants or success at fundraising. Social franchising aims to bypass these weaknesses by finding models that work, making sure they are self-financing, and then quickly scaling them up to reach as many people as possible. It's a model that is gaining more followers and the serious interest of big and small businesses.

One example is the Scojo Foundation in India, established to tackle the common problem of blurry vision as people age (presbyopia). Not a disease, the first symptoms occur between the ages of 40 and 50. Low vision affects 124 million people in the world according to the World Health Organization's [Vision 2020 campaign](#), organizers of World Sight Day 2007 on October 11.

Blurry vision is a serious disability for weavers, mechanics, goldsmiths and others whose livelihoods depend on near vision. As vision deteriorates, these people are unable to provide for their families. Yet it is easily treatable with a pair of eyeglasses.

Since, 2002, the [Scojo Foundation](#) (the social franchising wing of eyeglasses manufacturer [Scojo New York](#), has launched operations in Bangladesh, Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador and Ghana. Its largest and fastest growing operation is in India, where it employs more than 560 entrepreneurs in rural villages, and selling more than 50,000 pairs of glasses since 2001.

It has grown quickly because the business model has been replicated by local staff who work as franchisees. It has followed the franchise model by building a network of "vision entrepreneurs" - low-income men and women, who in turn sell reading glasses directly to rural villagers throughout India. The franchise model enables the "vision entrepreneurs" to earn a good income, and gain respect from other community members.

Nico Clemminck, co-author of a case study on Scojo, found the price was very competitive with other options in India, and that the higher quality of the glasses made them attractive to villagers.

"The franchisees, or Vision Entrepreneurs as Scojo calls them, that we met were very involved with Scojo - some of them shifting away their focus from previous occupations to spend the majority of their time on conducting vision screenings and selling glasses. The main reason is that the business is quite profitable to them - they make a US \$1 margin per glasses sold, which is very high compared to other retail products. A trend we did notice is that commitment decreases over time, as the entrepreneurs exhaust their immediate circle of relatives or target village populations, and the incremental sale becomes tougher to make."

According to Clemminck, Scojo has been able to quickly and successfully expand to other countries by forming partnerships with existing networks that reach into villages.

The profit hierarchy works like this: the manufacturer charges US \$1 for the reading glasses, Scojo charges another US \$1, the franchisee a further US \$1, and the customer pays US \$3 for the glasses. By creating profit at each stage, the model ensures the financial incentives are there to keep the distribution network active.

Prior to Scojo, it was believed developing infrastructure in rural Indian communities is too high to sustain a franchising model for low-cost products. Scojo found it was possible to succeed with this model, by focusing on profitability and sustainability right from the start, pursuing aggressive growth through partnerships to build economies of scale, blocking competitors by having a strong brand and first-mover advantage, constantly refining the model across regions, and delivering a tangible social benefit, both economic and health.

On average, franchisees work 20-30 hours per month and earn US \$15 to US \$20 per month. Considering most franchisees were living on US \$1 a day, the extra income is very welcome, Clemminck said.

"This project gave me insight into the large, untapped market opportunity that exists," says case study co-author Sachin Kadakia, "and how the concept of 'Bottom of the Pyramid' provides a tangible and significant improvement to the quality of life of people in these communities."

Another social franchise gaining ground in India is [Medicine Shoppe](#). As a chain of pharmacies, Medicine Shoppe targets underserved communities by offering entrepreneurs franchises. It is an offshoot of the largest franchiser of independent community pharmacies in the US, [Medicine Shoppe International Inc.](#). It can draw on its strong brand and identity to appeal to potential franchisees.

[Acumen Fund](#) fellow Nadaa Taiyab, who is working with Medicine Shoppe's expansion to help the rural and urban poor, found it was important to learn lessons and adapt the model.

"When I arrived in December (2006)," she said, "we opened the first Sehat Clinic. Last weekend we opened the seventh, with an eighth shortly underway. The model has undergone a tremendous evolution in the past six months. We shifted our site selection strategy from relatively affluent areas with a slum nearby, to locating the clinics right inside slums. We redesigned the process through which we recruit doctors and created an employment package that allows us to hire experienced doctors at a salary we can afford.

"We also implemented an entirely new concept for Medicine Shoppe called community marketing outreach. Through this program, we hire local women in each area to make daily home visits, refer patients to the clinic, spread health education and awareness, and promote our free health camps and health clinics. In the past four months we have held over 35 health-plus-vision-testing camps, serving over 4,000 people.

"We have also made some changes to the look and feel of the clinics and shops and put all our marketing materials in the local language, to make our services more appealing to low-income markets."

There are critics of the BOP approach, however. [Aneel Karnani from the Ross School of Business at the University of Michigan](#), argues from a for-profit perspective, business would be much better off targeting the needs of the growing middle classes, especially in countries like India and China. He, however, does acknowledge that social franchising businesses like above, where social responsibility is key, are relevant to meeting the needs of the poor.

#### LINKS:

- A detailed and thorough case study of how the Scojo Foundation model works is found [here](#).
- An excellent set of decision matrices to help budding social entrepreneurs and existing businesses to decide if social franchising is the right solution: [www.createproject.org](http://www.createproject.org)
- [The Social Enterprise Alliance](#) has built a knowledge network and extensive range of resources (including 160 case studies) on social enterprise.

## Treasure Troves and Poverty

Like music, food has a powerful ability to jump across cultural and regional barriers and unite people in the sheer pleasure of the meal. Tapping the rich vein of regional culinary heritages is also a great way to make money. Promoting local recipes and foods has other benefits: as the global obesity (or globesity as WHO calls it) epidemic reaches into the urban areas of cities in the developing world, anything that pulls people away from fast food and high-fat foods is a good thing. Doctors have found home cooking keeps people thin and is better for them.

The trend across the developing world towards eating away from home is another factor in the growing obesity crisis. While cooking at home allows for control of ingredients and portion sizes, eating out usually means more high energy and fatty foods. The global obesity crisis is threatening to reverse many essential health gains brought about by development. As communities prosper, diets become more reliant on junk food and fast food.

[The International Obesity Task Force](#) found 1.7 billion people in the world need to lose weight. There are now more overweight people in the world than hungry people. Neville Rigby, the policy director of the task force, told The Associated Press, "What's clear is that the developing world in particular is going to bear the enormous brunt of this weight gain. It's rapidly accelerating. We're even seeing obesity in adolescents in India now. It's universal. It has become a fully global epidemic – indeed, pandemic."

According to Dr Susan Jebb, Medical Research Council Director of Studies, Human Nutrition Centre, University of Cambridge, "getting back to a bit of home cooking could be a good start" to tackling the obesity crisis.

Increasing awareness of traditional and local recipes can generate income in many ways. From publishing cookbooks to inspiring restaurant and food vendor menus to sparking up supermarket product lines, whole industries can be built up from the humble recipe. Supermarkets in Africa are a growing sector. Executives from South Africa's Shoprite supermarket chain recently announced a doubling of their supermarkets in Uganda, and called supermarkets one of the fastest growing businesses in East Africa. UK supermarket chain Sainsbury's has already started to dispatch Fairtrade Ambassadors to Africa to trawl the continent for new products to stock their shelves.

So, the time is right for entrepreneurs to target the African food market and raise its profile. Seizing this opportunity is an ambitious project to digitally archive the vast and often hard-to-find treasure trove of African cookbooks. Announced at a conference in Tanzania this summer, the [African Cookbook Project](#) is seeking to gather together in one place all the past and present African cookbooks, effectively creating the most comprehensive resource of African recipes.

### LINKS:

- Africooks: Culinary Literature by Jessica B. Harris: This established African cookbook writer offers an excellent role model for budding cookbook authors: [www.africooks.com](http://www.africooks.com)
- A success story about a Senagalese restaurant in the US: [NYTimes article](#)
- [BetumiBlog and Betumi.com \(www.betumi.com\)](#): Betumi is the African Culinary Network and "connects anyone who delights in African cuisine, foodways and food history." [View photos](#).
  - An extensive list of African cookbooks available for sale: [here](#)
- [Africa's Big Seven](#): held every year, it is the main event that brings together food retailers and producers and is a perfect place to bring a new product looking to be launched.

## The Power of the Word: African Blogging and Books

"Culture is not a luxury ... Culture is the spiritual backbone of society": with these words Jan Kees van de Werk, the Dutch poet and long-standing advocate of African literature, summed up the importance of culture to Africa's development. Two trends could significantly alter the prospects for African writers in 2007: the new wave of African bloggers and websites that are now emerging, and the increasing awareness of African literature. More traditional writing is now being joined in 2007 by a surge in African blogging. As internet access has increased, and awareness of free blogging websites like [Wordpress](#) has also shot up, Africans are jumping online to express themselves (see also [Development Challenges, March issue](#)).

African literature is gaining an ever-greater audience through high-profile prize-winning. From veteran Nigerian writer and UNFPA Goodwill Ambassador Chinua Achebe winning this year's [Man Booker International Prize](#), to best-selling French language authors like Ivorian Ahmadou Kourouma (Allah is not Obligated) and Albert Memmi, winner of the French Academy's Grand Prix de la Francophonie. They are joined by many others gaining international acclaim, including Uganda's Monica Arac de Nyeko - winner of the prestigious Caine Prize for African Writing - Nigeria's Chris Abani (Graceland), Cameroon's Calixthe Beyala (Lost Honor), Congolese writer Daiel Biyaoula (Alley Without Exit) and Mauritius's Carl de Souza. The Salon International du Livre et de la Presse de Geneva has established the Ahmadou Kourouma Prize, and the new [Book Show for African Literature, Press and Culture](#) is scheduled for 2008.

Increasingly, the creative industries are gaining respect as a key part of a vibrant economy. The power of a successful author or musician to generate awareness and excitement about a country and its products, has gained the respect of many governments. And they are also learning to respect the wealth that can be generated. For example, in Britain the creative industries earn almost as much as the powerful financial sector ([Work Foundation](#)). The World Bank's private sector arm, the International Finance Corporation, has singled out Africa's creative sector for its future investment.

[Blogger Titilayo Soremi](#) in Abuja, Nigeria, is typical of the new wave. A business development officer for an NGO, her blog is a vivid snapshot of life in her country. [Obedi Sarpong in Accra, Ghana](#) is a budding poet and does not shy away from thorny issues. In his current blog, he tackles domestic politics and writes about the on-again, off-again electricity supply. The secretive Kenyan banker known by the name Bankelele is a lover of new ideas judging by his [blog](#). The content is a mix of financial tip-offs and upcoming business investment opportunities in the region, all stirred up with some rather frank thoughts on politics. He has also gone the extra mile and acquired sponsors for his blog (that banking experience is not going to waste).

The Internet age has also given birth to a new phenomenon: the so-called "long tail" This is best explained by Kelvin Smith in his paper '[African Publishers and Writers in British and International Markets](#)': "What now emerges is that more than half the revenue of Amazon is in the 'bottom' two million books on the list.

"So, the 'Long Tail' principle goes, we are now looking at a technology that can service the needs not of dozens of markets of millions, but millions of markets of dozens. This has great significance for the small publisher, whether that publisher is in a large publishing nation or in a country where publishing is a smaller scale activity."

It looks as if getting creative is not only fun, it can be the next goldmine for Africa's entrepreneurs.

### LINKS:

- [Kwani](#) is a lively Kenyan journal of new and young writers. They also organize regular readings and events in Nairobi.
  - [The African Review of Books](#): an excellent introduction to new writing from Africa.
  - [African Publishers Network \(APNET\)](#): Strengthening Indigenous Publishing in Africa.
    - [Africa's 100 best books](#), a list launched in Accra, Ghana in 2002.
- [Shapeshifters](#): a global networking website for creative people that has reached out to African creatives to get them networked.
- [BHF Magazine](#): A Contemporary African Lifestyle: A Nigerian high-fashion magazine launching this summer.
  - A list by country compiled by the [British Council of contemporary African authors](#).

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### ■ The Next 4 Billion: Market Size and Business Strategy at the Base of the Pyramid

Publisher: World Resources Institute

Website: [www.nextbillion.net](http://www.nextbillion.net)

### ■ You Can Hear Me Now: How Microloans and Cell Phones are Connecting the World's Poor to the Global Economy

by Nicholas P. Sullivan, Publisher: Jossey-Bass

Website: [www.youcanhearmenow.com](http://www.youcanhearmenow.com)

### ■ The Emerging Markets Century

by Antoine Van Agtmael, Publisher: Free Press

--Coiner of the phrase 'emerging markets', Agtmael predicts the third world "will overtake the developed world by 2030-35." He points out 60 of Fortune magazine's top 500 global companies are now based in emerging markets. He also reveals the dynamism of South-South business.

### ■ Why Cooperate? The Incentive to Supply Global Public Goods

by Scott Barrett, Publisher: Oxford University Press

Website: [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)

### ■ XS Green: Big Ideas, Small Buildings

by Phyllis Richardson, Publisher: Thames and Hudson

--celebrates eco-friendly micro-design around the world

Website: [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)

### ■ Promoting Small and Medium Enterprises for Sustainable Development

by the World Council for Sustainable Development.

--It provides advice to governments, large corporations and the local community on how to support SMEs.

Website: [www.wbcsd.ch](http://www.wbcsd.ch)

## Job Opportunities

#### ■ [Africa Recruit Job Compendium](#)

##### ■ [Africa Union](#)

##### ■ [CARE](#)

##### ■ [Christian Children's Fund](#)

##### ■ [ECOWAS](#)

##### ■ [International Crisis Group](#)

##### ■ [International Medical Corps](#)

##### ■ [International Rescue Committee](#)

##### ■ [Internews](#)

##### ■ [IREX](#)

##### ■ [Organization for International Migration](#)

##### ■ [Oxfam](#)

#### ■ [Relief Web Job Compendium \(UN OCHA\) \(1\)](#)

#### ■ [Relief Web Job Compendium \(UN OCHA\) \(2\)](#)

##### ■ [Save the Children](#)

##### ■ [The Development Executive Group job compendium](#)

##### ■ [Trust Africa](#)

##### ■ [UN Jobs](#)

##### ■ [UNDP](#)

##### ■ [UNESCO](#)

##### ■ [UNICEF](#)

##### ■ [World Bank](#)

##### ■ [World Wildlife Fund \(Cameroon\)](#)



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